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ABSTRACT

Virginia's Standards of Learning Program is designed to provide a set of standards reflecting the commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12. The program also measures student learning through statewide testing on the standards in grades 3, 5, and 8 and for certain high school courses; enhances teacher competence through teacher training; ensures a quality education through school accountability; and maintains communication with parents of student progress through school performance report cards. This guide provides information to parents regarding the development of Virginia's core standards in the areas of English, math, science, history and social sciences and computer technology, and describes how student learning is measured and reported to parents. The guide also includes sample test questions from tests for students in Grades K through 3, Grades 4 and 5, and Grades 6 through 8; and lists ways parents can help their child succeed in school. High school graduation requirements are delineated, including requirements for a standard diploma, an advanced studies diploma, and a modified standard diploma. Answers to frequently asked questions and a list of the commonwealth board of education complete the guide. (KB)

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Every Child Can Succeed . . .

A Parent's Guide to Virginia's Standards of Learning Program

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Every Child Can Succeed ...

A Parent's Guide to Virginia's Standards of Learning Program

It's the Dream of Every Parent
for each child to be given the chance to fulfill his or her potential.

It's the Hope of Every Student
to earn a diploma that gives him or her a foundation for future success.

It's the Goal of Every Teacher
to have a classroom of students who learn, are challenged, and achieve.

It's the Expectation of Every Employer
to hire high school graduates who are motivated, conscientious, and know the basics.

What Do Virginians Expect?

Despite the improvements to American public schools, large numbers of students are graduating from high school lacking basic reading, writing, and math skills.

Employers Expect More ...

Employers say a high school diploma does not always guarantee that a graduate will be able to perform.

College Professors Expect More ...

Professors say many freshmen are not prepared for college-level work.

Teachers Expect More ...

Teachers say students would learn more if schools raised their expectations.

Students Expect More ...

Students say their schools don't challenge them to do their best.

Parents Expect More ...

Parents say their children could be learning more.

What Is Virginia's Plan?

To provide clear, basic, academic goals through ... instruction in the Standards of Learning.

To measure student learning through ... testing on the standards.

To enhance teacher competence in content and classroom practices through ... teacher training.

To ensure a quality education for each student in every community in Virginia through ... school accountability.

To maintain communication with parents of student progress through ... *School Performance Report Cards.*

What Are Virginia's Standards of Learning?

Standards of Learning set expectations for teaching and learning. They are statements of knowledge and skills that every child is expected to learn and use in solving day-to-day problems and to be a productive citizen. These standards were developed with the assistance of thousands of parents, teachers, business leaders, college professors, and other educators united by their concern for quality education.

While there are standards in many areas, the core standards clarify what students are expected to know and accomplish in the following subjects:

- English
- math
- science
- history and social science (including geography, economics, and civics)
- computer technology

Through the standards, knowledge and skills acquired during the course of a school year build a foundation for subsequent learning. However, the standards are not - and are not intended to be - the entire curriculum for a grade level or course. The standards are organized by grade levels to help teachers choose content and skills appropriate for their students. Teachers are encouraged to go beyond the standards in their instructional program and decide which teaching methods to use with their students.

A copy of the *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools* is sent home for children to share with their families. This document is also found on the Department of Education Web site: www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml.

If you do not have a copy of the *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools*, contact your child's school.

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How Is Student Learning Measured?

- Standards of Learning tests are given in grades 3, 5, and 8, and for certain courses in high school.
- Some students may take tests at other grade levels based on the school's curriculum.
- Students who take courses for high school credit in middle school also take the related Standards of Learning tests.
- Tests are given in English, math, science, history, and computer technology.
- The tests measure content knowledge, scientific and mathematical processes, and reasoning.
- The tests in English are for reading and writing. For the writing test students must write a composition. All other tests are multiple choice.
- Tests are untimed, which means that students have as much time as they need to answer the questions.
- Tools needed to complete a test, such as rulers and calculators, are provided.
- New test questions, approved by Virginia teachers, are added each year while others are removed or "retired." Copies of the Spring 2000 tests can be found on the Department of Education Web site, located at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/release2000/.
- High school students have the option to substitute other standardized tests for the end-of-course tests, such as Advanced Placement (AP), SAT II, College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), and International Baccalaureate (IB). A full list of Board of Education-approved substitute tests is available on the Web site at www.pen.k12.us/VDOE/Instruction/Subassess.html.

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How Will I Know How My Child Did on the Standards of Learning Tests?

Test results are sent to parents in a document called *Report to Parents: Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments*. The report includes:

- A listing of the tests taken, such as English, math, science, history, and computer technology.
- The number of questions the student answered correctly for each test, as well as the total number of test questions.
- A summary of the student's performance for each test on a scale from 0-600. A student must receive a score of 400 or higher to pass the test. If a student scores 500 or more, he or she is considered to have performed at an advanced level, while a student scoring between 0-399 is considered to have failed the test.
- Each subject is divided into separate reporting categories. Each reporting category shows the number of questions the student answered correctly for each reporting category, and the total number of test questions in each reporting category.

The Spring 2000 released test questions are available on the Department of Education Web site at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/release2000/. You will also find suggestions and learning activities you can use with your child at home.

Some sample questions from the 1998 test appear on the following pages. Answers are found on the inside back cover.

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Sample Test Questions K-3

MATH

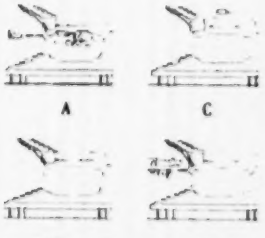
The third-grade students at Larkfield Elementary School sold gift-wrapping paper to earn money for the school library. This bar graph shows how many rolls of each kind of paper they sold.

Which two kinds of paper sold a total of 60 rolls?

A Frogs and Bears
B Bears and Penguins
C Lizards and Frogs
D Lizards and Penguins

SCIENCE

In which pot will the water evaporate the fastest?



A C

B D

What Types of Things Are Taught through the Standards of Learning?

For specific information by subject or grade level, please refer to the *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools* booklet or the Web site, www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml.

In Grades K through 3, What Do Children Need to Know?

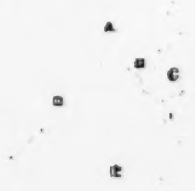
In grades kindergarten through 3, the focus of the instructional program is the development of basic skills in reading, writing, and math. They learn to read a variety of literature; and learn to use a variety of methods to solve problems involving addition and subtraction of whole numbers. Students [illegible] to build science concepts and begin to understand their world through exploring topics in social studies. Students conduct investigations of the natural world including weather, food chains, and components of soil; and learn about the discovery and colonization of America, and the basic functions of government.

HISTORY

The ancient Chinese built the Great Wall mainly to —

A provide water for their crops
B honor their emperors
C protect against invaders
D teach their building methods to other people

Maryland is marked with the letter -



A A
B B
C C
D D

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In Grades 4 and 5, What Do Children Need to Know?

In grades 4 and 5, students continue to develop basic skills in reading, writing, and math. They read classics and contemporary literature by a variety of authors and documents related to the study of Virginia; and develop a proficiency in using whole numbers, fractions, and decimals to solve problems.

Students are introduced to the basic principles of electricity, energy, sound, and light; and learn about people, ideas, and events in time and history with emphasis on Virginia and United States history.

In addition, by the end of grade 5, students should understand computer principles and technology, be able to process, store, retrieve, and send electronic information, and communicate using software.

ENGLISH: WRITING

Read this next section of Keisha's rough draft and answer the questions below. This section has groups of underlined words. The questions ask about these groups of underlined words.

(14)I wanted to give Peeper some talking lessons, just in case, while I were waiting to find out. (15)My father told me how to train Peeper. (16)"Choose one short sentence," he said. (17)"Say it to Peeper over and over, every chance you get." (18)I decided to teach Peeper how to say, "Peeper is a pretty bird." (19)I said it twenty times a day.

(20)One morning, I lifted the cover from Peepers cage. (21)I looked at his face and noticed that his cere was bright blue.

(22)"Peeper is a pretty bird!" he said.

In sentence 14, while I were waiting should be written -

A while I have been waiting
B while I am waiting
C while I was waiting
D as it is

In sentence 20, Peepers cage should be written -

F Peeper's cage.
G Peeper'es cage.
H Peepers' cage.
J as it is

Sample Test Questions 4-5

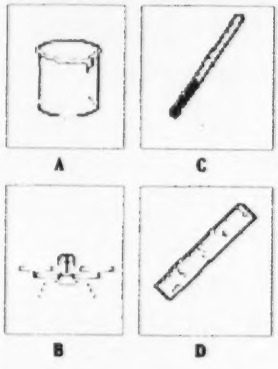
MATH

Happy Holiday Park is in the shape of a circle. If Jessica walks around the outside edge of the park, what part of a circle has she walked?

A Chord
B Circumference
C Diameter
D Radius

SCIENCE

Which of these would be used to measure the mass of a pencil?



A C

B D

HISTORY

Before the U.S. Constitution was adopted, the government of the colonies was based on the —

A Declaration of Independence
B New Jersey Plan
C Articles of Confederation
D Bill of Rights

COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY

If a file is accidentally erased, what is the *least* way to get the information back?

A Re-enter the information
B Use the back-up copy of the file
C Cut and paste the file
D Restart the computer

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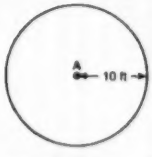
Sample Test Questions 6-8

MATH

Tamika and her brother played a board game with a number cube with sides numbered from 1 to 6. On her last roll, Tamika needed a 5 or greater to win the game. What is the probability she won the game?

A 1/6
B 2/6
C 3/6
D 4/6



Point *A* is the center of the circle. Which is closest to the circumference of the circle?

A 15.7 ft
B 31.4 ft
C 62.8 ft
D 314.1 ft

SCIENCE

The major contribution of mushrooms, bacteria, fungi, and other decomposers to a Virginia forest ecosystem is that they -

A hold the soil in place
B recycle nutrients
C provide energy for producers
D supply moisture for animals in the soil

In Grades 6 through 8, What Do Children Need to Know?

In grades 6 through 8, the focus of the instructional program is the preparation of students for high school.

They study and use oral communication skills, examine the impact of media on public opinion, and learn and apply interviewing techniques. Students continue to investigate mathematical concepts in preparation for Algebra I. They continue to conduct systematic investigations and study life science, natural resource management, and physical science.

In addition, by the end of grade 8, students should become more skilled at communication using computer software, networks, and telecommunications; and practice processing, storing, retrieving, and transmitting electronic information.

HISTORY

All of the following contributed to the start of the Great Depression ***except*** —

A overproduction of industrial goods
B increase in personal savings
C high tariffs on imported goods
D expansion of easy credit

COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY

When Melissa was asked to help with the talent show costumes, she decided to look up designs on the Internet. Which piece of software creates the most user-friendly environment for her to explore the Internet?

A E-mail
B Web browser
C Home page
D Video connector

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How Can Parents Help?

- ✔ Read aloud to your child, beginning at an early age.
- ✔ Require regular attendance in school.
- ✔ Encourage good study habits.
- ✔ Be familiar with the curriculum associated with your child's classes and grades.
- ✔ Talk to your child about what he or she is learning in specific subjects.
- ✔ Expect homework of some kind to be done every night.
- ✔ Set aside a specific time for homework.
- ✔ Ask questions about your child's homework.
- ✔ See that your child brings home and reviews class notes and other work done in school that day.
- ✔ Help your child balance study time with recreational time.
- ✔ Think of activities your child can do at home that relate to information being taught in school.
- ✔ Help your child apply his or her school learning to real-life situations in the news or life.
- ✔ Emphasize the importance of high academic achievement. Let your child know that you understand that tests may be challenging, but that taking them provides the opportunity to show how much he or she has learned.
- ✔ Be supportive and encouraging.

What Does My Child Need for a High School Diploma?

To earn a high school diploma in Virginia, students must earn the required minimum number of units of credit in effect when that student first entered the 9th grade. There are two types of units of credit that a student may earn:

- A standard unit of credit is earned by completing 140-hours of instruction and passing the course.
- A verified unit of credit is earned by passing a course and its related Standards of Learning test or approved substitute test.

Students may repeat the end-of-course tests as many times as necessary to earn the verified credit required for graduation.

A student may be eligible for an expedited retest on an end-of-course test if he or she meets the following conditions:

- Needs the test for verified credit, and
- Passed the course associated with the test, and
- Either failed the test with a scaled score between 375-399; or failed the test by a wider margin and has extenuating circumstances; or for legitimate reasons - such as a death in the family - was not present for the regularly scheduled test.

Students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for a Standard, Advanced Studies, or Modified Standard Diploma will be awarded a Special Diploma when they have met the requirements of their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

For specific course requirements for each type of diploma, consult your child's guidance counselor.

Students who do not meet the requirements for any of the available diplomas may be awarded a Certificate of Program Completion when they conclude a course of studies approved by the local school board.

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Standard Diploma

Students who entered the 9th grade in school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 must earn 22 standard units of credit:

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required
English	4
Mathematics	3
Laboratory Science	3
History and Social Sciences	3
Health and Physical Education	2
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1
Electives	6
Total	22

Students entering the 9th grade in school years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 must earn 22 standard units of credit and six verified credits:

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required	Verified Credits Required
English	4	2
Mathematics	3	
Laboratory Science	3	
History and Social Sciences	3	
Health and Physical Education	2	
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1	
Electives	6	
Student Selected Tests		4
Total	22	6

Students entering the 9th grade in school years 2003-2004 and beyond must earn 22 standard units of credit and six verified credits:

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required	Verified Credits Required
English	4	2
Mathematics	3	1
Laboratory Science	3	1
History and Social Sciences	3	1
Health and Physical Education	2	
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1	
Electives	6	
Student Selected Tests		1
Total	22	6

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Sample Test Questions End-of-Course

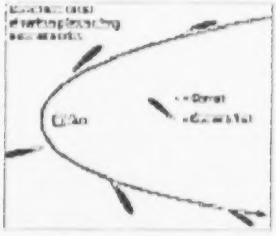
ENGLISH: WRITING

Chen has decided to enter a writing contest. He wants to write a story about a family member who has had to overcome an obstacle to reach a personal goal.

Which of these would *least* help Chen get started on his story?

A Watching a video about families
B Writing the rough draft of his story
C Listing family members he would like to write about
D Thinking of a title for his story

SCIENCE



What accounts for the position of a comet's tail?

A The solar wind pushes the tail away from the sun.
B The sun's gravity pulls the tail away from the comet.
C The tail is thrown from the comet by centrifugal force.
D Friction causes material in the tail to boil away from the comet.

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Sample Test Questions End-of-Course

MATH

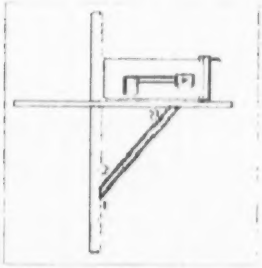
The temperature in a greenhouse must satisfy the condition

$155 < 2t - 5 < 165$

where t is the temperature in °F. Which inequality satisfies this condition?

A $72.5 < t < 77.5$
B $75 < t < 80$
C $80 < t < 85$
D $82.5 < t < 87.5$

In the installation of a mailbox, a brace is needed to hold up the ledge on which the mailbox is secured.



If the ledge must be perpendicular to the pole $m\angle 1 = 130°$, what is $m\angle 3$?

A 40°
B 50°
C 60°
D 70°

HISTORY

Which of the following traditions encouraged harmony with nature?

A Confucianism
B Taoism
C Buddhism
D Legalism

Advanced Studies Diploma

Students who entered the 9th grade in school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 must earn 24 standard units of credit:

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required
English	4
Mathematics	4
Laboratory Science	4
History and Social Sciences	4
Foreign Language	3
Health and Physical Education	2
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1
Electives	2
Total	24

Students who entered the 9th grade in school years 2000-2001 and beyond must earn 24 standard units of credit and nine verified credits:

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required	Verified Credits Required
English	4	2
Mathematics	4	2
Laboratory Science	4	2
History and Social Sciences	4	2
Foreign Language	3	
Health and Physical Education	2	
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1	
Electives	2	
Student Selected Tests		1
Total	24	9

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Modified Standard Diploma

This diploma is intended for certain students at the secondary level who have a disability and are unlikely to meet the credit requirements for a Standard Diploma. The student's Individual Education Program (IEP) team and the student's parents determine eligibility and participation, at any point after the student's 8th grade year.

Beginning in school year 2000-2001, students must earn 20 units of credit and pass literacy and numeracy competency assessments.

Students in the 10th grade and above in the 2000-2001 school year who choose to pursue this diploma will be required to pass the Literacy Passport Test.

Other students must pass the 8th grade English (Reading, Literature, and Research) and mathematics Standards of Learning tests to meet the literacy and numeracy requirements.

Discipline Area	Standard Units of Credit Required
English	4
Mathematics	3
Science	2
History and Social Science	2
Health and Physical Education	2
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1
Electives	6
Total	20

Some Questions from Parents like You

Q: How good are the Virginia Standards of Learning? Are they accepted nationally?

A: Virginia standards are among the best in the nation, according to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. The AFT gave Virginia top honors for its standards in all four disciplines and called the standards "exemplary" and "worthy of a close look by other states." According to the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's *The State of State Standards* report, Virginia received one of the top six cumulative scores for state standards across all subjects.

Q: What if my child is doing well in school but fails a Standards of Learning test? Can my child be held back and fail his/her grade?

A: Your child's test score for the subject is only one of many factors school administrators use to determine if your child passes a course or is promoted to the next grade. A school is required to give additional instruction to a child who fails all standards tests in grades 3, 5, and 8. High school tests may be retaken if the student fails.

Q: Can the tests be given later in the school year so the teachers will have more time to teach before the test?

A: To allow the tests to be given later in the year, the Virginia Board of Education worked with the test contractor to shorten the time between taking the tests and receiving test scores. Local school divisions now have the option of scheduling the tests nearer to the end of the school year. This option will allow more classroom instruction time, and still provide test results in time to plan summer remediation programs.

Q: How do I know how well my child's school is doing overall?

A. Your child's school will distribute an annual *School Performance Report Card* issued by the Virginia Department of Education. It gives percentages of students who pass each test in your child's school as well as the school district and statewide percentages.

Q: What other information does the *School Performance Report Card* provide?

A: Each *School Performance Report Card* includes the school's accreditation rating, a comparison of schoolwide and state Standards of Learning scores, and information on the number of students, attendance, teacher training, and school safety. *School Performance Report Cards* for secondary schools also include graduation information and participation rate in advanced academic programs.

For a complete description of Virginia standards, refer to the publication *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools* distributed to all parents through local school systems. The document is also provided on the Department of Education Web site: www.pen.k12.va.us.

Call (804) 225-2020 or 1-800-292-3820 (Virginia only) or write to P.O. Box 2120, Richmond, VA, 23218-2120 to request a copy.

References:

Public Agenda's Reality Check 2000

National Assessment of Educational Progress

Educational Excellence Partnership

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Sample Test Questions - Answers for K-3
(page 6 & 7)
MATH: D
SCIENCE: B
HISTORY: C, B
ENGLISH; WRITING: C, F

Sample Test Questions - Answers for 4-5
(page 7)
MATH: B
SCIENCE: B
HISTORY: C
COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY: B

Sample Test Questions - Answers for 6-8
(page 8)
MATH: B, C
SCIENCE: B
HISTORY: B
COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY: B

Sample Test Questions - Answers for End-of-Course
(page 11 & 12)
ENGLISH; WRITING: C
SCIENCE: A
MATH: C, A
HISTORY: B

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